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ABSTRACT

The task of developing teacher education programs which are fresh and innovative but which are also practical, sensitive to numerous restraining factors, and ultimately appropriate for preparing teachers in a specific area of the country is most complex. While an ever-growing body of professional literature is currently available, the valuable resources for new approaches to preparing teachers in a specific setting are those that exist in: (1) the university environment itself, namely, the teacher education faculty; (2) local area public school professionals; and (3) faculty colleagues outside the college of education. A description of how Mississippi State University, a charter member of the Holmes Group, approached this task is provided in this report. (JD)

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THE CHANGE PROCESS AND THE REDESIGN OF A TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

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THE CHANGE PROCESS AND THE REDESIGN OF A TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

Introduction

The current quest for quality in education has begun to have a significant effect on teacher preparation programs across the country. In response to this quest for quality, colleges of education are busy scrutinizing and, in many cases, redesigning their offerings, the ultimate goal being the preparation of high quality educators. An important aspect of these efforts has been incorporating research on effective teaching and schooling to improve initial preparation programs. According to Hawley, Austin, Goodman (4) considerable change is taking place in the way teachers are being educated. They indicate that the most significant changes have occurred relative to entrance and exit criteria. It is obvious that most of the changes have occurred because of external demands resulting in the addition of courses without any significant change in subject matter taught. Legislative and other policy making groups have, in some states, mandated a decrease in the number of professional education courses that are permitted in baccalaureate programs. Unfortunately, there is a paucity of research that supports some of the more popular demands for changes in increased field experiences, decrease in professional education courses and elimination of the elementary education major.

While there seems to be some general agreement throughout the teacher education profession relative to the characteristics and skills that teachers should possess as a result of a preparation program, there are diverse views as to its philosophical orientation, program design, and the change process related to its development. One reason for this is basically a philosophical one which relates to diverse professional opinions regarding the nature and content of the courses, as well as the role and responsibilities of the K-12 school systems. Other reasons, however, relate to a variety of external mitigating factors, such as (a) specific certification requirements mandated or recommended by state departments of education, (b) the short amount of time that colleges have been given by governmental agencies to redesign their programs, (c) the variety of liberal arts requirements that have been added to undergraduate programs in all disciplines in universities and colleges across the country, and, (d) the generally negative attitudes towards teacher education held by college and university faculty outside the field of education.

Hawley, Austin, Goodman (5) state that the three prominent approaches to change are (a) complex organization, (b) conflict theory, and (c) diffusion approach. They indicate that the complex organization approach emphasizes changes in relation to the environment of inputs and outputs, whereas the conflict theory concept implies that any change in the organization must be negotiated through the power bases and interest orientations of various interest groups. The diffusion approach focuses on the manner in which innovations permeate or spread throughout the organization.

The basic rationale for the reform efforts of The Holmes Group was that change would occur if there was a substantial commitment from the nation's best research universities. Significant elements were that these institutions have substantial resources. They do, in fact, majority of the professorate in education, have faculty who, on the whole, are the best sources of information and they do engage in specific research on teacher education.

Although the research efforts of Marsh and Bowman were directly related to K-12 educational programs, they state in Educational Policy (6) the following:

> "It is not clear that either the current version of top-down or bottom-up strategies can be effective for implementing the new curriculum focus, which includes higher-order thinking, problem solving, and communication skills. Instead, it is likely that the successful implementation of this new curriculum will need to draw on the best of both the top-down and bottom-up strategies. From the top-down strategy, this new wave of reform will need a clear yet progressive vision of the curriculum focus and alignment of curriculum goals, instructional materials, and especially assessment procedures and criteria so that the site has a consistent and coordinated set of policy parameters."

The task of developing programs which are fresh and innovative but which are also practical, sensitive to numerous restraining factors, and ultimately appropriate for preparing teachers in a specific area of the country is most complex. While there is, of course, already an ever-growing body of professional literature currently available, the valuable resources for new approaches to preparing teachers in a specific setting are those that exist (a) in the university environment itself, namely, the teacher education faculty; (b) local area public school professionals; and, (c) faculty colleagues outside the College of Education. A description of how one university approached this task is provided in the paragraphs to follow.

Change Process at Mississippi State University

At Mississippi State University, the COE faculty and administrators began its redesign developmental efforts by co-sponsoring with American Association of Colleges in Teacher Education (AACTE), a national conference at Olive Branch, Mississippi, in November, 1981. One of the outcomes of this conference was a concept paper which was subsequently used in preparing the AACTE publication entitled, "Educating a Profession: Profile of a Beginning Teacher." (3) At approximately the same time, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) was beginning its redesign efforts.

Certainly, the knowledge and research bases for teacher education programs have been expanding and developing considerable credibility. Dr. Tom Good, a University of Missouri researcher, spent time on the MSU campus to acquaint faculty with some of these efforts. Shortly thereafter, a plethora of reports addressing the issues associated with education in general became available. The Nation at Risk served as a catalyst for much reform. In February, 1985, the National Commission for Excellence in Teacher Education issued its report entitled, "A Call of Change in Teacher Education." (1) Prior to the issuance of this report, six COE faculty attended a Commission meeting in Atlanta and Dr. Robert Egbert came to the campus to make a presentation to the faculty.

Dr. C. Peter McGrath, Commission Chairman, spoke to the MSU University faculty at its annual convocation. Currently, several public school superintendents came to campus to discuss personnel preparation programs with faculty. Further efforts in the COE included obtaining three-year funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement in the National Institute of Education to address some of the issues associated with program development.

The developmental work was further fostered by major provisions of the Mississippi Education Reform Act of 1982, which, in fact, preceded The Nation at Risk report. The Act stated that the State Department of Education would no longer prescribe the curriculum to be followed; instead, teacher education institutions would have the flexibility to develop their own teacher preparation programs, the approval of which would be contingent upon the new teacher's ability to perform to an acceptable level on sixteen generic teaching competencies, which had been identified by the teaching profession.

In September, 1985, a Professional Education Core Steering Committee (PECSC) was established by the dean and included representatives from the dean's office and from each of the departments with undergraduate teacher education curricula in the colleges of education and agriculture. Committee members were selected to not only include diversity of opinion, but also to include energetic individuals who had the respect of their colleagues. They were asked to conceptualize a defensible model program based upon research, the knowledge base and proven practices, not to be overly concerned about its length, with the understanding it could be extended beyond the conventional eight semesters, but that additional funding was not necessarily available. Further, it was agreed that the traditional courses were not sacrosanct, and the committee should not devote energy to the managerial issues of departmental listing of courses and faculty resource allocations.

Other parameters include the University's required 45 semester hours general education core, the American College Test College Outcome Measures Program (ACT COMP) admission test, a 2.50 G.P.A. admission requirement, satisfactory completion of the National Teachers Examination and 12 weeks of student teaching.

Its initial task was to develop a philosophical and procedural direction for the professional education curriculum. The work progressed in several stages, the first being the identification of resources which would be useful in the development of curriculum content. In addition to Mississippi's Sixteen Professional Teaching Competencies and other teaching competencies considered important by the committee, the group utilized the results of the OERI grant entitled, "Research Applications for Teaching" (RAFT), the NCATE redesign, the existing professional core curriculum, and various timely publications (such as "Profile of a Beginning Teacher"). Input was also solicited from all teacher education faculty relative to their individual professional expertise and from public school teachers and administrators. From this study, a comprehensive knowledge base was subsequently developed. An important element of the knowledge base was the RAFT Project which included the detailed planning of six instructional modules to emphasize the following skills: (a) cognitive understanding of research on effective teaching and schooling; (b) strategies for developing effective classroom interactions; (c) classroom

management skills; (d) instructional and implementational skills for rural youth from widely divergent socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds; (e) student evaluation skills, and, (f) application of the above skills to content areas.

The next stage involved a study of the knowledge base relative to Mississippi's Sixteen Professional Teaching Competencies and additional ones (labeled MSU Competencies). This resulted in the narrowing of the knowledge base into five broad areas, each independent from, and yet dependent upon, the other. It was at this time that the committee expressed a strong concern that the new curriculum not exist as isolated, one-time courses representing the various knowledge bases. The need for as much integration as possible became of prime importance, as did the need for numerous applications of theory throughout the process. In this regard, the committee adopted a "spiral" concept which specified that integrated instruction during successive semesters would build upon prior knowledge and culminate with the student teaching experience. An important dimension of the program will be that of having faculty model exemplary diverse instructional strategies.

An advisory panel of faculty from the College of Education and the College of Arts and Sciences, as well as public school teachers and principals, reviewed the modules before they were piloted.

Another important event, although not necessarily planned in the redesign efforts, occurred in December, 1986, when MSU was invited to be a charter member of The Holmes Group, which is a consortium organized around the twin goals of the reform of teacher education and reform of the teaching profession. After careful study and deliberations, it was decided that membership in The Holmes Group could be advantageous because of the information and data that might become available even though some of the basic tenets were not necessarily acceptable. Membership in the consortium has also been valuable because it has given some continued momentum to the redesign efforts.

The third stage involved the organization of the Professional Education Core Curriculum (PECC) in a spiral fashion into four sub-cores, beginning with the first semester of the junior year, with students progressing from Core I through Core IV in cohort groups. The logistics for the PECC are supervised by an associate dean. Interdisciplinary instructional teams, based on recommendations from the PECSC, are formed and are given primary responsibility for implementing the content of the modules.

Although additional developmental efforts and revisions are continuing, implementation of the new professional education core began in September, 1988. Students and faculty seem to be elated with what is transpiring. In fact, the excitement has become contagious as additional faculty are becoming eager to have teaching assignments in the new program. Evaluation studies have been designed to determine if the teaching competencies of graduates have improved over those teachers completing prior programs. These data, from the 1989 graduates, indicate that NTE scores are somewhat higher with significant differences in evidence on our measures of self-concept and other attitudinal instruments.

Some challenges remain such as having the needed printed instructional materials. There is a need for more faculty to be identified and provided

with opportunities for further personal professional development and growth. Additional use of technology and bonafide clinical settings for instructional purposes will require our best thoughts and efforts, but we remain optimistic.

Conclusions

The information and data reported in SREB in its study as well as those experienced by Mississippi State University lead to the following general conclusions.

1. Varying degrees of trauma accompany all change endeavors and therefore, involves risks.

2. Change will not exceed the competence of those involved in the process, or of those who are being asked to change. The leadership must demonstrate knowledge about the change process, the various political scenarios, and exhibit a serious commitment to the endeavor.

3. Institutional leaders must propose the change effort as building on, rather than departing from, the historical background role and mission of the institution.

4. An organizational structure needs to be created which cultivates and facilitates a sense of ownership among the varied constituencies.

5. Institutional leaders, both administrators and faculty, should broadly define a problem that needs to be addressed. There does need to be a diffusion of leadership to accommodate the emergent leader.

6. Effective, permanent change requires the commitment of resources in the form of time, competence, and money. This needs to be in evidence while the planning process is occurring.

7. Appropriate incentives are needed for the faculty which can be intrinsic and/or extrinsic.

8. Successful implementation requires not only top-level commitment and involvement, but also that of faculty and student leaders and others to be affected by the impending changes.

9. External pressures do not necessarily explain the magnitude of the change.

10. Change can be either substantive or symbolic. Substantive changes require a systemic approach which includes faculty participation throughout the process whereby there is adequate representation of conflicting views and priorities.

11. The changes create a new set of problems and challenges.

12. Teacher education programs can lose enrollment, faculty, and money and still not make significant changes.

13. All progress is the result of change, but all change is not necessarily progress.

14. Reasonable people adapt to the ambience of their environment; whereas unreasonable people try to have the environment adapt to them.

15. Individuals will not invest the energy in change unless there is some sense of urgency, and also there is a possibility of success in the endeavor.

16. Saliency and the possib lity of being an influential actor are also factors. However, some will become engaged simply for the opportunity to be influential.

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